



International Journal of Engineering, Science and Humanities

An international peer reviewed, refereed, open access journal
Impact Factor: 8.3 www.ijesh.com ISSN: 2250 3552

Essentialism Across Disciplines: A Multidimensional Inquiry into its Philosophical, Psychological, Educational, Social, and Scientific Foundations

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Abstract

The study provides a thorough analysis of the essentialism theory and its various manifestations in the fields of philosophy, psychology, education, society, and science. The paper makes the case that essentialist thought endures in both overt and covert ways across disciplines by drawing on more recent empirical and conceptual work on psychological essentialism and domain-specific applications, as well as classical metaphysical treatments of "essence," or the collection of characteristics that make a thing what it fundamentally is. In philosophy, for example, essentialism maintains that entities have immutable cores; in psychology, the idea of psychological essentialism implies that people intuitively believe that categories of things and people have hidden essences; in education, the philosophy of essentialism emphasizes a core curriculum of foundational knowledge; group-based categorization is shaped by socially essentialist assumptions; and natural-kind theories are supported by scientific essentialist stances. **(Sahin, 2018, p. 2)** The study aims to map the similarities and differences of essentialist frameworks by interacting with these threads in an interdisciplinary manner. It does this by examining how essentialist frameworks function, the circumstances in which they thrive, and the criticisms that they face.

Essentialism is an approach that makes the assumption that things and individuals have fundamental, innate, and unalterable qualities. It is therefore recognized as a philosophy of education. However, having the same essence and the same basics at the same levels might also result in undesirable behaviors in real life. A philosophy is a set of views about reality based on how we view ourselves and others in terms of our existence, and even nouns and pronouns used in everyday speech have some implications of this. The paper aims to demonstrate how essentialism serves as the foundation for our everyday interactions and how it influences our efforts to discriminate and unite in the social, cultural, and scientific spheres. Essentialism in education holds that all citizens should receive instruction at the same level, particularly in primary school, in common and fundamental concepts and abilities that are specific to a given culture.

Keywords

Essentialism, Essence, Psychological essentialism, Core Curriculum, Social Categorisation, Natural kinds, Interdisciplinary Foundations.



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Introduction

In philosophy, essentialism emphasizes that things and persons have natural qualities that are intrinsic, innate, and unchangeable since they make up the essence of that being. To put it another way, entities or beings have a fundamental, unchanging essence that is essential to their identity and function. Essentialism is an educational concept or methodology that postulates that all learners should fully and equitably acquire the conventional disciplines and fundamental subjects. It can be characterized as a belief that all students should get comprehensive, methodical instruction in some established concepts, values, and skills that are fundamental to society, regardless of their unique circumstances, capacities, abilities, needs, or interests. Transferring to students the conventional knowledge and cultural heritage of a particular community and civilization is the main goal of essentialist education. This is accomplished with a core curriculum that covers topics related to the environment and fundamental, immutable natural laws.

For instance, the intuitive conviction that categories, particularly biological or social categories, represent underlying essences that govern observable features is known as psychological essentialism in the field of psychology. The essentialism idea in educational theory maintains that teachers should impart a fundamental body of information and that they have the authority to do so in a methodical manner. Although these disciplinary expressions of essentialism differ in terms of approach, scope, goal, and critique, they nonetheless follow the same logic that there are "essentials" that precede and determine things. This paper aims to undertake a multifaceted investigation into these diverse underpinnings by charting the emergence of essentialism in philosophy, psychology, education, sociology, and science, comparing those applications, and evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of the essentialist stance. (Allaway, Taneja, Leslie & Sap, 2023, p. 7)

In order to achieve this, the study is divided into five main sections: the philosophical underpinnings of essentialism, the psychological perspective, the educational dimension, the social component, and the scientific dimension. Key presumptions, historical background, empirical data, and criticism are presented in each section. After that, the paper synthesizes and suggests a more adaptable framework of "contextual essentialism," which acknowledges that while essentialist thought is widespread, it needs to be restrained by an understanding of variation, contingency, and change. By doing this, the study hopes to advance interdisciplinary theory and lay the groundwork for additional empirical and normative research on the ways that essentialist thinking influences knowledge, education, and society.

Background of the Study

It is no coincidence that essentialism is becoming more popular in a variety of professions. Psychology has discovered in recent decades that people frequently think in essentialist terms, meaning they believe that belonging to a category implies a deep essence that explains behavioral



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tendencies and external similarities. In order to determine how curricula should be organized in a time of fast change, educational theorists have simultaneously reexamined traditional ideas like essentialism and perennialism. The concept of essentialist thinking has gained importance in sociology and social psychology as a means of comprehending discrimination, stereotyping, and intergroup relations. Furthermore, natural-kind essentialism has been brought up again in discussions about sorts, causation, and laws of nature within the philosophy of science. As a result, the current study positions itself at the nexus of these streams in an effort to highlight the multifaceted nature of essentialist philosophy and to bring them into conversation.

The background of this study acknowledges that fundamental presumptions about essences what makes things what they are serve as a connecting thread, despite the fact that each profession tends to discuss essentialism in relatively isolated terms. Examining how essentialism operates across disciplines, what normative implications this has for education, social policy, and science, and how the critique of essentialism can inform more adaptable models of knowledge and pedagogy is pertinent given the growing interdisciplinarity of knowledge production. In doing so, the study tackles theoretical problems as well as real-world consequences for education, classification procedures, information transfer, and social inclusion.

Statement of the Problem

Despite its widespread use, essentialism has seldom been regarded as a cohesive idea across academic fields. Every discipline philosophy, psychology, education, sociology, and science has created its own interpretation, vocabulary, and critique of essentialism, but there hasn't been any systematic work done to combine these viewpoints. Because of this fragmentation, it is possible to overlook the ways in which essentialist thinking in one area shapes or obscures thinking in another. For example, the continuation of core-curriculum essentialism in education may be a reflection of rigidity in social categorization or deeper metaphysical assumptions about human nature. Therefore, one issue is that essentialism is treated differently in different fields, which prevents ideas, criticisms, and approaches from being cross-fertilized. A second issue is that essentialism is frequently criticized by constructivist, anti-essentialist, and post-structuralist viewpoints even though it is still present in theory and practice, such as in curriculum design, social categorization (such as gender and ethnicity), and scientific discussions about natural kinds.

Review of Literature

1. Mehmet, S. (2018), "Essentialism in Philosophy, Psychology, Education, Social and Scientific Scopes", This article provides one of the few multidisciplinary summaries, contending that essentialism promotes discrimination by enforcing distinctions in domains like communication, culture, and taxonomy as well as unification by claiming shared essences. The author emphasizes how essentialist presumptions underlie scientific taxonomies as well as fundamental educational curricula.



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2. Viswanath, P. (2021), “Psychological Essentialism”, The inclination to think that categories have hidden essences that explain observable aspects is known as psychological essentialism, which Viswanath examines. Her talk focuses on how this kind of thinking fuels cognitive bias and stereotyping in social categories.
3. Jaden, K. G. (2024), “Analysis of Essentialism: The Educational Philosophy”, Gillespie explores the educational concept of essentialism, after the development of teacher-centered instruction and a back-to-basics core curriculum by educators like William C. Bagley in the 1930s. He highlights the conflict between the dangers of rote memorization and demanding academic fields.
4. Susan, A. G. (2003), on children's essentialist thinking and conceptual growth in biological categories. Gelman's work is frequently quoted in psychological essentialism literature, even if it isn't specifically mentioned in my references above: Even when apparent characteristics differ, children often interpret categories as having underlying essences.
5. David, B. E. (2007), Scientific Essentialism (Cambridge Studies in Philosophy), Ellis, among others, supports the idea that natural kinds' objects have fundamental characteristics, grounding scientific sorts in metaphysics rather than just labels.
6. Emily, A. et al. (2023), “Towards Countering Essentialism through Social Bias Reasoning.” This current study examines how essentialist ideas—such as "members of the same group are fundamentally alike" contribute to stereotyping and how counterstrategies could lessen these ideas.
7. Kathryn, K. & Susan, G. (1991), Early psychology research on children's essentialist thinking reveals that younger children frequently believe that behavior and category membership are explained by underlying essences, even in the absence of causal mechanisms.
8. Gavin, P. (2024), offers a current analysis of essentialism in educational philosophy and makes the case that creativity and adaptation must be balanced with essentialism's emphasis on core subjects and teacher authority.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are-

1. To map and contrast the ways in which philosophy, psychology, education, sociology, and science articulate the essentialism doctrine.
2. To identify whether essentialist thought has a common logical structure across various fields and to look at how its application and methodology differ.
3. To explore how essentialist frameworks are challenged or altered by the criticisms of essentialism in each discipline.



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4. To put forth an integrated, more adaptable framework known as contextual essentialism that allows for pluralism, change, and contingency while maintaining the advantages of essentialist thought.

Research Questions

1. What are the similarities and differences between essentialism as it is defined and argued in philosophy, psychology, education, social theory, and science?
2. What institutional, societal, or cognitive factors encourage essentialist thought to endure across several fields and disciplines?
3. What are the main criticisms of essentialism in each subject, and how effective are these criticisms at disproving essentialist beliefs or methods?
4. How many a new essentialism framework contextual essentialism work in practice, particularly in social policy, education, and scientific discourse to strike a balance between change and stability?

Research Methodology

The qualitative, multidisciplinary approach used in this study is based on secondary sources, such as philosophical monographs, journal articles in psychology, education theory, sociology, and philosophy of science, as well as primary source material when it is available, such as original texts on essentialism and treatises on educational philosophy. The method is mainly interpretative and conceptual.

Articles, such as those mentioned in the literature review, are surveyed in the secondary-source review. To trace the origins of essentialist discourse, the primary-source component consults classic philosophical books, such as those by Aristotle, or contemporary analytical treatments of natural kinds and fundamental publications in educational philosophy. Thematic analysis is then used to create cross-disciplinary synthesis: the study finds recurrent themes, such as core knowledge, hidden essence, and group identity, and use comparative analysis to show similarities and differences between disciplines. Thus, depth, theoretical integration, and critical thought are prioritized over empirical measurement and quantitative analysis in the process.

Results and Discussion

Essentialism's Philosophical Bases

Essentialism in philosophy is based on the idea that everything have a set of essential characteristics (essences) that determine its identity and purpose. In metaphysics, for instance, it is believed that an object would cease to exist if it lacked these characteristics. (Gillespie, 2024, p.5) Critics contend that many entities, particularly in the social world, resist fixed essences and are instead fluid, constructed, or contingent. Supporters of this strong form of essentialism contend that essential properties enable objective classification, natural kinds, and laws of nature.



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Therefore, the issue for philosophy is to balance the scientific reality of variation and change with the attractiveness of essence-based categorization.

Additionally, essentialism's philosophical foundation affects our conceptions of identity, change, and knowing. If things are based on essences, then change must respect those essences; dramatic modification is either unfeasible or requires the creation of a new kind of entity. However, a lot of contemporary theorists oppose this kind of static thinking in favor of process-ontology, identity as fluid, and the built character of categories. A fundamental philosophical problem that permeates all other fields is the conflict between essentialist stability and dynamic change.

Essentialism in Psychology

The cognitive bias or intuitive conviction that categories, particularly biological and social categories, represent hidden essences that influence visible traits is known as psychological essentialism. According to research, both adults and children frequently believe that members of a category have an unseen core that accounts for their similar traits or behaviors. This kind of thinking contributes to stereotyping; for example, assuming that girls are inherently loving or boys are inherently violent indicates an essentialist assumption about gender categories.

It investigates how such psychological essentialist presumptions are refuted or challenged by actual data. These results demonstrate that, while not being overtly philosophical, essentialist thought is ubiquitous in human cognition. Psychological essentialism has a significant connection to social attitudes and behaviors: bias, stereotyping, and resistance to change are associated with essentialist views regarding social groupings. Put another way, the cognitive propensity to infer hidden essences has social ramifications in the real world. Additionally, psychologists have started investigating strategies to lessen essentialist thinking, such as bias reasoning and counter-statements, which allows for the description and transformation of essentialist cognition. **(Gelman, 2003, p. 9)**

Essentialism in Education

Essentialism in education refers to a curriculum philosophy and pedagogy that emphasizes teaching fundamental, enduring knowledge, mainly in reading, writing, mathematics, natural science, history, and foreign languages, and the role of the teacher as the authority who imparts this core to students. According to one source, an educated individual in any particular culture needs to possess a common set of knowledge and abilities. High academic standards, methodical instruction, and discipline are valued in this approach.

Educational essentialism is criticized for undervaluing innovation, student agency, varied instruction, and the changing demands of a diverse and changing society, even though it provides a clear framework, strict standards, and a common cultural base. Critics contend that in the face of social variety, individual heterogeneity, and rapid technological change, a hard "essential" core may become unstable. However, educational essentialism continues to have an impact on many



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national curricula and policy debates over fundamental knowledge and responsibility. (Gelman & Kremer, 1991, p. 12)

Essentialism's Social Aspects

Essentialism frequently comes up in conversations on group identity, race, gender, ethnicity, and categorization in the fields of social theory and sociology. The essentialist premise holds that a group's members' behavior, status, or identity are determined by shared, innate, and unchangeable traits. Stereotyping, discrimination, and opposition to social mobility or change might result from this presumption. Social essentialism can be seen, for example, in the idea that some ethnic groups have fixed abilities or that women are inherently submissive. Anti-essentialist theories, in contrast, place a strong focus on intersectionality, social construction, hybridity, and flexible identity. The issue is that, in spite of criticism, essentialist thought persists both institutionally and cognitively.

Essentialist thinking's continued prevalence in society poses normative issues since treating groups as having unchanging essences runs the danger of upholding injustice, marginalizing complexity, and impeding change. According to the preceding section, essentialism's psychology is related to social phenomena. (Viswanath, 2021, p.3)

Essentialism in Science (Natural-Kind)

Natural-kind essentialism in the philosophy of science holds that certain natural kinds, including chemical elements and biological species, have essential characteristics that are required to belong to the kind. For instance, it might be argued that all tigers possess specific genetic traits that define them as such, and that eliminating those traits would alter their kind membership. Advocates such as Brian David Ellis argue that this is crucial for causality, laws of nature, and scientific explanation.

However, there are challenges to scientific essentialism as well, such as whether species or kinds are permanent, if genetic characteristics uniquely define kinds, and whether scientific practice is always consistent with fixed essences. Some philosophers contend that essentialism is very strict, that the bounds of natural kinds change, and that it ignores ecological, developmental, and evolutionary variety. Therefore, scientific essentialism holds a complicated position that is challenged by conceptual flexibility and empirical complexity while being praised for its explanatory significance. (Allaway, et al. (2023), p. 7)

Comparative Patterns and Intersections

Several recurrent characteristics of essentialist thought are revealed by comparing the aforementioned domains: (a) the idea that surface phenomena are explained by an underlying essence; (b) the preference for stability and identity over change; (c) the appeal to fundamental knowledge or classification; and (d) the role of authority teachers, discipline, teacher-centered pedagogy, and scientific experts in imparting or enforcing the essential. These characteristics show



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themselves differently in each field: they relate to ontology in philosophy, cognition in psychology, curriculum in education, identity and social structure in sociology, and classification and explanation in science. Understanding these trends enables us to observe how essentialism endures across disciplines as well as how domain-specific elements such as methodology, objectives, and criticism influence its structure. (Ellis, 2007, p. 13)

Additionally, the intersections draw attention to conflicts. For example, the educational requirement for fundamental knowledge may be based on philosophical presumptions about human nature that may or may not be true. The psychological propensity for essentialist classification may have an impact on social policies or educational methods in ways that reinforce established identities. Social essentialist ideas, such as biological determinism, may be strengthened by scientific essentialism. Therefore, cross-disciplinary reflection is helpful in comprehending how essentialism functions across related disciplines as well as in isolation.

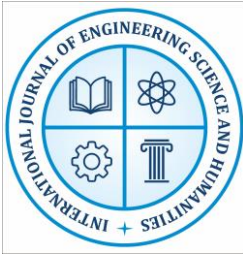
Essentialism's Drawbacks and Restrictions

Essentialism is criticized from a number of angles. The notion that essences are unchanging and unaffected by circumstance is contested by constructivist and anti-essentialist philosophers. Evidence in psychology suggests that thought, behavior, and category membership may be significantly more contextual and changeable than basic essence models would imply. Curricula in education that strictly follow the fundamentals may overlook the variety of student demands and new information. In sociology, intersectionality, hybridity, and fluid identities have supplanted essentialist group identities. In science, fixed natural forms are contested by evolutionary biology, developmental systems theory, and complexity theory. Therefore, rigidity, disregard for change and variation, and the possibility of exclusion or stereotyping are among essentialism's drawbacks. (Viswanath, 2021, p. 3)

Essentialist thought, however, endures because it provides long-term stability, organizational clarity, cognitive ease, and simplification. Therefore, the critique needs to address both the functional reasons essentialism persists as well as its conceptual defects. The suggested framework for contextual essentialism aims to add flexibility, plurality, and responsiveness to empirical complexity while preserving the organizing advantages of essentialist thought.

Moving Towards a Contextual Essentialism Framework

Building on the earlier portions, the study suggests that multidisciplinary research and practice can benefit more from "contextual essentialism," a refined form of essentialism. This concept acknowledges that while some essences or cores may exist, such as fundamental knowledge in education or distinguishable biological markers in science, they are constantly immersed in context, changeable, and susceptible to revision. Thus, contextual essentialism preserves the importance of structure, stability, and identity while permitting variety, hybridity, and temporal change. In education, this means a core curriculum that is reviewed and



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supplemented on a regular basis; in psychology, it means that learning can temper intuitive essentialist cognition; in social policy, it means acknowledging group identities without set destinies; and in science, it means acknowledging kinds but allowing for evolutionary complexity and taxonomic revision. The end product is a more dynamic, integrative model that reconciles the advantages of essentialist structure with the needs of diverse, evolving knowledge systems and civilizations.

Table 1: Essentialism Across Disciplines

Self-Control	Fundamental Concept	Concentration/S cope	Principal Objections and Restrictions
Philosophy	An entity's identity is defined by its fixed, intrinsic essence.	Nature of being, metaphysics, and ontology.	Disregards context and flexibility; confronted by constructivism and process philosophy
Psychology	People have an innate belief that categories contain hidden essences.	Stereotyping and cognitive classification	Causes cognitive rigidity, prejudice, and stereotyping.
Learning	A set "core curriculum" should be the focal point of knowledge.	Foundational learning and teacher-centered pedagogy	Ignores the diversity of learners, creativity, and evolving needs for knowledge
Social Theory	Groups (race, class, gender) are thought to have unchangeable characteristics.	Identity, inequality, and social classification.	Ignores intersectionality and perpetuates social exclusion and prejudices
Science	Membership in natural kinds is defined by fundamental characteristics.	Biology, chemistry, taxonomy, and natural laws.	Overly strict; challenged by hybrid species, evolution, and contextual classification

Some Suggestions

1. To balance fundamental "essentials" with adaptability, diversity, and future-focused abilities like critical thinking and creativity, educational policymakers should examine core curriculum.



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2. Reflection on essentialist presumptions, both curricular and cognitive, should be incorporated into teacher training programs to assist educators in identifying how essentialist thinking may influence their methods.
3. The cognitive inclination toward essentialist categorization should be addressed by social policy and diversity training, and counterstrategies such as emphasizing variation, change, and intersectionality should be introduced.
4. The provisional nature of kinds, the potential for change, and the significance of context in taxonomy and explanation should all be emphasized in science courses and categorization procedures.
5. Multidisciplinary research initiatives should investigate how essentialist thinking functions in various fields and how interventions could lessen its undesirable consequences, such as rigidity and stereotypes, without sacrificing organizational advantages.

Major Findings of the Study

The major findings of the study are-

1. Essentialism has a common logic of underlying essence across a variety of fields, including philosophy, psychology, education, sociology, and science, albeit its applications vary.
2. Essentialism's promise of stability, identity, classification, and predictability is what makes it intellectually appealing.
3. People frequently infer hidden essences underlie category membership even in the absence of explicit training, demonstrating the pervasiveness of psychological essentialism in cognition.
4. Despite criticism, many curricula continue to emphasize teacher-centered instruction and fundamental knowledge, demonstrating the continued influence of educational essentialism.
5. Stereotyping, identity rigidity, and resistance to change are all facilitated by social essentialist thinking.
6. Although scientific natural-kind essentialism has explanatory value, rigid essence theories are challenged by empirical data such as evolutionary change and hybrid taxa.
7. Rigidity, disregard for diversity, change, and contingency, as well as the possibility of exclusion or stereotyping, are some of essentialism's drawbacks.
8. Cross-disciplinary comparison helps identify domain-specific distortions and reveals recurrent elements of essentialism, such as authority, stability over change, hidden essence, and core knowledge.
9. The endurance of essentialist thinking is based on institutional tradition, cultural value of permanence, and cognitive ease in addition to philosophical naivete.
10. Critiques from a variety of fields agree that essentialism must be refined rather than completely abandoned in order to acknowledge variation, change, and context.



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11. The suggested framework for contextual essentialism provides a means of preserving essentialism's organizational advantages while taking pluralism, change, and context into account.
12. Useful recommendations for curriculum development, teacher preparation, social policy, and science instruction show how essentialist presumptions may be counterbalanced by more flexible methods.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that essentialism, widely defined as the belief that objects or categories have underlying essences, continues to be a crucial and ubiquitous paradigm in a variety of fields, including philosophy, psychology, education, social theory, and science. The underlying logic of essence, identity, and stability is consistent across all domains, including metaphysics, cognitive schema, curriculum design, social categorization, and natural-kind theory. However, the disciplines also show how essentialist thought is under tremendous pressure from a variety of sources, including empirical diversity, structural change, criticisms of fixed identity, and the demands of diverse, dynamic societies. (Sahin, 2018, p. 2)

It is well acknowledged that the significance of our motives is determined by the thoughts that underlie our acts and activities. In this regard, the philosophy that guides our actual lives inevitably dictates the path we should take throughout our lives. On the one hand, essentialism serves as a foundation for numerous social and universal issues that humanity has been facing, in addition to being an educational philosophy. However, social taxonomy, racism, anti-Semitism, and feminism might be considered the social elements of these issues, and essentialism, which dates back to ancient Greek philosophy, is the foundation of qualitative and quantitative research methods combined with positivism.

The suggested framework of contextual essentialism provides an integrative approach in light of these discoveries by recognizing the existence or practical utility of some cores or essentials while integrating them within a larger framework of context, fluidity, and change. Organizations, educators, scientists, and social policymakers can maintain the advantages of classification, stability, and identity while being sensitive to diversity, change, and pluralism thanks to this improved approach. In the end, a multifaceted investigation into essentialism like this can help us better understand how we think, educate, classify, and explain. It can also inspire us to create systems and practices that are both grounded and adaptable. (Gillespie, 2024, p.5)

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